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# THE HOLY TRINITY OF DEMOCRACY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND SECURITY

EU Democratization Efforts Beyond its Borders -  
The Case of Tunisia

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Assem Dandashly

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# THE HOLY TRINITY OF DEMOCRACY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND SECURITY

## EU DEMOCRATIZATION EFFORTS BEYOND ITS BORDERS - THE CASE OF TUNISIA

**Assem Dandashly**

### Abstract

The EU has been engaged in democracy promotion, human rights, and civil liberties in the Mediterranean countries for over two decades with results ranging from very limited success to total failure. The revolutions in the Arab world – that have caught the EU and Western countries by surprise – provide a window of opportunity for real democratic reforms in the region. The successful democratization in Tunisia will send positive messages to the neighboring countries. Why should the EU be more involved in supporting Tunisia’s democratic transition? And what can the EU do to support Tunisia’s efforts to build and reform its institutions and to move towards a consolidated democracy with a functioning market economy? Answering these research questions requires understanding the major failures of the EU in the Mediterranean region – the Union of the Mediterranean is on hold and conditionality (at least political conditionality) is problematic and questionable. Prior to the Dignity Revolution, security and stability were moving in the opposite direction to democracy –leading the EU to focus more on the former. Now, consolidating democracy, economic development, stability, and security on the EU’s Southern borders are moving in the same direction. This paper argues that, first, supporting democracy is a necessary condition for guaranteeing stable and secure southern borders and, secondly, economic growth is a necessary condition for consolidating democracy and political reforms in Tunisia.

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## Contents

1. Introduction	5
2. EU Democracy Promotion Beyond its Borders: Current Literature and Shortcomings	6
3. Analytical Framework: Democratization in the MENA Post Arab Spring	8
4. Case Selection - Tunisia	9
5. Democratic Transition, Consolidation, and the EU's Role	10
5.1 <i>The Dignity Revolution – A Postponed Certainty</i>	10
5.2 <i>Post-Revolution Measures and the Role of the EU</i>	11
6. Conclusion	17
Literature	20

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Twenty-two years have passed before the third wave of democracy from former Soviet countries could cross the Mediterranean and reach the North African shores.<sup>2</sup> A new wave of democracy has started (e.g., Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya) that will put the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) to a new test. The outcome of this transition is still uncertain. Since the end of the Cold War, the European Union (EU) has increasingly been using soft power (Nye 1990) to consolidate democracy and to spread human rights and market economy principles to Central and East European Countries (CEECs) (Ladrech 1994; Börzel 1999; Radaelli 2000; Featherstone 2003). Although the EU was not the driving force for reforms in CEECs, it successfully supported the transition (Börzel/van Hüllen 2011: 8). The EU influenced CEECs preferences and choices through conditionality, social learning, and policy transfer resulting in significant institutional development (Risse 1996, 2004; Christiansen et al. 2001; Schimmelfennig/Sedelmeier 2004).

The successful story in CEECs did not have a positive spillover to the ENP countries, although the EU has been engaged in democracy promotion, human rights, and civil liberties in the Mediterranean countries for over two decades with results ranging from very limited success to total failure. This ineffectiveness resulted from the EU viewing the Mediterranean from a security and stability angle, even if that meant stabilizing authoritarian regimes and maintaining the fragile cooperation with those regimes in fighting terrorism and illegal immigration. The 2011 review of the ENP highlighted the lack of EU effectiveness, stating that the current uprisings in the region “have shown that EU support to political reforms in neighboring countries has met with limited results” (European Commission 2011: 1). The EU and all Western countries were caught by surprise when the revolution started in Tunisia and by the inability of Ben Ali’s regime to silence it.

The questions this paper tries to answer are: Why should the EU be more involved in supporting Tunisia’s democratic transition? And what can the EU do to support Tunisia’s post 2011 *Thawrat al-Karama* (Dignity Revolution) effort to build and reform its institutions and to move towards a consolidated democracy with a functioning market economy?

Answering these research questions, the paper argues that prior to the Dignity Revolution, security and stability were moving in the opposite direction to democratic reforms and transition, leading the EU to focus more on the former. Now, consolidating democracy, economic development, stability, and security on the EU’s Southern borders are moving in the same direction, which pushes the EU to be more involved in supporting Tunisia’s transition. Instability in the EU’s Southern neighbors would create more problems to the EU security and affect the ability to fight illegal immigration and terrorism. This argument has two dimensions:

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2 The third wave started in the mid 1970s with the Carnation Revolution, Portugal, and continued to the 1980s and early 1990s with the democratic transitions in Latin America and Eastern Europe.

1. Supporting democracy is a necessary condition for guaranteeing stable and secure Southern EU borders.
2. Economic growth is a necessary condition for consolidating democracy and political reforms in Tunisia, thus, there is a need to address the deteriorating economic situation – especially the high unemployment, social inequality, and low growth – that triggered the revolution in Tunisia.

Another argument the paper deals with is that the rise of moderate political Islam is not a hindrance to democracy but rather would strengthen it in Tunisia. The support of modern Islamism is important to avoid the rise of more radical groups such as the Salafis.

The aims of this paper are: Firstly, to understand what the EU can do in Tunisia following the fall of authoritarianism; secondly, to draw lessons from the EU experience within the framework of the ENP; thirdly, to check what CEECs' experience could offer to Tunisia regarding democracy building;<sup>3</sup> and, fourthly, to see how the EU and the West will deal with the rise of modern Islamic ruling parties and be able to differentiate them from other more radical parties such as Hamas for example.

The paper uses literature on democratization, conditionality, and socialization to answer the research questions. It builds on previous research by Börzel (2010), Börzel and Risse (2012), Börzel and van Hüllen (2011), Dahl (1971), Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2011), Linz and Stepan (1996a; 1996b), Lipset (1959; 1960), Powel (2009a; 2009b), and van Hüllen (2012). The next section discusses the literature on the EU's democracy promotion beyond its borders and its shortcomings. Section three presents the analytical framework of the paper. Section four offers a brief discussion on the case selection. Section five analyzes the case of Tunisia in the wake of the revolution and the road to institution building and democracy. Finally, the results are summarized and a conclusion is presented.

## 2. EU Democracy Promotion Beyond its Borders: Current Literature and Shortcomings

While the EU's attempts to promote democracy and develop a market economy in nearby former communist countries have been successful,<sup>4</sup> the outcomes in European countries further east and the Mediterranean has been limited. Driven by their eagerness to come "back to Europe" and to join the EU, CEECs have given "the EU an unprecedented influence on the restructuring of domestic institutions and the entire range of public policies" (Schimmelfennig/Sedelmeier 2004: 661). This development has pushed CEECs to meet the *acquis communautaire* and to join the EU in 2004, followed by Bulgaria and Romania in 2007.

3 Despite the similarities that both CEECs (under communism) and Arab Mediterranean countries (pre revolutions) share, I am not arguing that the post-revolution transition in Tunisia will be the same as in Poland or other CEECs. The paper does not offer a comparison with CEECs, which is beyond the focus of this study, but is rather interested in drawing some applicable lessons from the EU-CEECs' experience.

4 While the EU played a crucial role in helping CEECs' transition processes, it was not the driving force of transition (Schimmelfennig et al. 2006). By the time CEECs received the membership prospect in 1993, most CEECs had a "relatively high level of statehood and democracy" (Börzel/van Hüllen 2011: 8; see also Schimmelfennig 2005; Vachudova 2005).

The situation with respect to the EU's neighbors – at least the Mediterranean countries – has been different since the “transformative power of socialization and social learning has been equally limited so far” (Börzel 2010: 18). The idea of coming back to Europe has not been relevant in this context and the EU membership incentive is absent from relations with those countries. Furthermore, the efforts regarding “democratization” and “state building” are either nonexistent or very weak (Börzel 2010: 5). The relation with the Mediterranean is mainly based on positive conditionality, coordination, cooperation, dialogue, and partnership with no sanctions or coercive power exercised (see Youngs 2009). This limits the ability of the EU for having a strong domestic influence on its Mediterranean neighbors.<sup>5</sup>

All in all, the EU's democratization efforts outside Europe have been incoherent, weak, and without serious implications (Schimmelfennig 2007), mostly based on “linkage”, “leverage”, and, more recently, “governance” (Lavenex/Schimmelfennig 2011). Linkage is a bottom-up approach in which the EU supports civil society groups hoping that this will be reflected in a change at the political level. Leverage is a top-bottom approach that targets the political system, i.e., governments, expecting that they will implement democratic reforms. While linkage is mainly based on socialization, leverage uses political conditionality (Lavenex/Schimmelfennig 2011). These two models were implemented with more focus on the former since relations with neighboring countries were mostly based on cooperation, as negative conditionality has been on hold for a long time. With the launch of the ENP, a new “indirect way of democratic governance promotion” (Lavenex/Schimmelfennig 2011: 895) was created. This new method targets various sectors and “locates the notion of democracy at the level of the principles that guide administrative rules and practices in the conduct of public policy” (Lavenex/Schimmelfennig 2011: 895).

Many scholars such as Vachudova (2005) or Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2011) found that the EU's success in helping CEECs to consolidate their democratic systems was based on the membership perspective accompanied by a favorable domestic environment. If the political elites think that EU conditionality, even with the ‘golden carrot’ of EU membership, will be costly for the regime, then the EU will not be effective (compare the case of Slovakia in mid 1990s). In the case of ENP countries in which not only the ‘golden carrot’ is absent, but that have also been ruled by authoritarian regimes that are not in favor of any change, the EU's democratization efforts could not be of any success.<sup>6</sup>

5 The institutionalization of the EU-Mediterranean relations started with the Barcelona Process in 1995, followed by several summits. With the successful transition in CEECs, a new EU attempt was developed for the same purpose through the ENP in 2004. The main aim of this policy is to have good relations with EU neighbors and to give them privileges based on a joint commitment to shared norms and principles (e.g., democracy, good governance) (European Commission 2009), in addition to “preparing partners for gradually obtaining a stake in the EU's Internal Market” (European Commission 2004). The ENP has developed “an explicit positive political conditionality, which is based on the negotiation, implementation, and regular monitoring of the bilateral AP [Action Plans]” (van Hüllen 2009: 7) while no sanctions or “negative political conditionality” are involved in the EU-Mediterranean relations (van Hüllen 2009: 8). The emphasis on these three main dimensions (democracy, security, and market economy) was raised again at the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean in July 2008 and further elaborated during the Marseille Meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean in November 2008. The quality of governance which covers a wide range of issues such as free and fair elections, political parties, civil society, separation of powers, an independent judiciary etc. is a crucial component of the ENP. Moreover, the ENP with the Mediterranean neighbors focuses on issues related to illegal immigration and trafficking which are crucial for EU security.

6 It is important to highlight that the focus on security and stability in Middle East and North African countries (MENA) is also among the main reasons for the EU's limited effect.



Thus, the EU efforts resulted in stabilizing “the governments rather than the kind of short-term systemic political change that may bring to power Islamist parties” (Youngs 2009: 911). Its democratization influence varies across countries – from more advanced cooperation in the case of Morocco to a very limited influence as it is the case of most countries including Tunisia. However, any success is based on the extent to which the concerned member is willing to cooperate with the EU’s democracy and human rights promotion. The best outcomes so far are “liberalized nondemocratic regimes”, “pseudo-democracies”, or “hybrid democracies where some democratic institutions coexist with nondemocratic institutions outside the control of the democratic state” (Linz/Stepan 1996b: 15).

### 3. Analytical Framework: Democratization in the MENA Post Arab Spring

A true window of opportunity that has opened lately in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya makes the domestic environment more receptive to introducing democratic and economic reforms. The ENP<sup>7</sup> is put to a real test to help these countries in their transition, as it was the case with CEECs post 1989. The EU should move beyond its mere economic and security motives in its relations with these countries and the continuous fear of the rise of Islamists to power should not stop the EU’s support for democratization. Now, there is an opportunity for the transformative power of Europe – in the areas of democracy promotion and human rights – to be effective since the domestic environment is favorable.

For a long time, at least since the Barcelona Process, stability and security were moving in the opposite direction to democracy. With the revolutions and the quest for democracy in those countries, the situation has changed and a holy trinity is formed combining security/stability, democracy, and economic growth. Reforms in these three areas (security, democracy and economy) are interrelated and are feasible with the combined efforts of domestic forces and the West, mainly the EU. Furthermore, building trust between the newly elected government and the West is important for the effectiveness of such reforms. The West, which had been backing Ben Ali for a long time, is viewed suspiciously, especially when trying to dictate some conditions that Tunisia has to follow in order to get financial support. The Tunisian government has been critical of that situation and viewed it as interference in its domestic affairs. The same story was repeated with the United States when their ambassador to Tunisia criticized the judicial ruling that penalized a television station’s executive for showing a film that does not respect the divine (The Washington Times 2012). Such a situation requires the West to be very careful in approaching some domestic issues that are considered to be against the religious and cultural pillars of the Tunisian society, and hence should not be viewed as freedom restrictions.

Building on Stepan and Linz (1996a; 1996b), Dahl (1971), Lipset (1959; 1960), Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2011), Przeworski and Limongi (1997), and Rueschemeyer et al. (1992), I argue that both the Tunisian government and Western powers need to focus on five key issues that are necessary conditions for moving

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<sup>7</sup> The ENP is based on bilateral agreements, the so-called ENP Action Plans. The aim of such plans is the agenda setting “of political and economic reforms with short and medium-term priorities. Implementation of the ENP Action Plans (agreed in 2005 with Israel, Jordan, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Tunisia and Ukraine, in 2006 with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and in 2007 with Egypt and Lebanon) is underway” (European Commission 2009).

towards a consolidated democracy: first, *national reconciliation* (Loannides/Missiroli 2012) in which the various societal and political powers should be included in the planning for the country's future. Even some of the old regime elites who are not corrupt need to be involved because isolating them could create problems for economic, institutional, societal, and political development. In this situation, many lessons could be learned from the experience of CEECs. Secondly, *economic development*, building on Rueschemeyer et al. (1992) and Przeworski and Limongi (1997), there is a relationship between economic development and democracy. The better a democratic country performs economically, the higher are the chances of democracy to survive. Since the main trigger of the revolution in Tunisia was the deterioration of economic development and an increase in unemployment, social injustice, and inequality, there is a need to focus on economic development if the current government is to succeed and to move towards a consolidated democracy. Third, it is hard to discuss economic reforms and development without addressing *institutional, administrative, and political reforms*. This area enables Tunisian bureaucracies and institutions to be more effective, efficient, and productive. Political and institutional reforms are crucial for economic development and attracting investors. Fourthly, improving the *rule of law and the security sectors* (Loannides/Missiroli 2012) constitute necessary steps towards equality and justice as core elements of any democratic system. Fifthly, building an *independent civil society* (Loannides/Missiroli 2012), with strong and active members as, e.g., nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) has a positive effect, not only in the transition process, but also on consolidating democracy by creating an internal bottom-up pressure for democratization. These five areas require hard work from the Tunisian authorities and also a combination of the EU's three main tools for democratization (linkage, leverage, and governance) in addition to the coordination with other influential Western powers such as the US, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and the World Bank.

#### 4. Case Selection - Tunisia

Tunisia is the first test case for a larger project that will include other North African countries such as Morocco and Algeria. The case of Tunisia is supposed to be an easy case for the EU's efforts to support the democratic transition and consolidation. Tunisia is characterized by having a strong statehood and a modern society with strong ties to the French system and culture. In comparison to its neighbors, Tunisia has a highly educated, more coherent population and an active civil society. Supporting democracy building and institutionalization in Tunisia is affordable to the EU and will have positive spillovers to the rest of the region, showing that democracy is affordable and could succeed in the Arab World.<sup>8</sup>

A successful democratization in Tunisia might prove to the Arab countries in general and the North African countries in particular that *Arab exceptionalism* is not true. It might push for further democratic reforms in Morocco and might give the calls for more freedom, reforms, and social justice in Algeria more power, what could constitute a new momentum against the army's control and oppression. So, Tunisia is in front of a real test: reforming the economy and constructing a functioning and stable democratic system by moderate Islamists, the *En-Nahda Party*.

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<sup>8</sup> Due to the uniqueness of the post-independence Tunisian identity, this should not be understood as that the Tunisian experience (success or failed democratic transition) will be replicated elsewhere.

## 5. Democratic Transition, Consolidation, and the EU's Role

For a long time, Tunisia was considered at the forefront in its relations with the EU as its main trading partner, a good ally, and very close to EU values and beliefs. The US and France turned a blind eye to Ben Ali and his ruling party's (*Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique – Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD)*) violations of individual freedoms, human rights, and civil liberties. Ben Ali's party held an iron grip over all aspects of political life such as the parliament, state and local governments, civil society groups, the freedom of speech etc. Any attempt to threaten this iron grip was never forgiven. Most opponents to the regime were either silenced or in exile.

Despite the emphasis on democracy, human rights, individual freedoms, supporting institutions, fighting corruption, independence of the judiciary, right for fair trial, and political modernization in the Association Agreement signed between the EU and Tunisia on 17 July 1995<sup>9</sup> and re-emphasized in the ENP, these aims remained in official documents and declarations without real implementation. In Tunisia and the rest of the MENA region, Euro-Mediterranean partnerships have been characterized by a Eurocentric interest-based vision that focused heavily on economy, security, stability, anti-terrorism, and illegal immigration. As a consequence, this more economic support of an authoritarian regime increased inequality, corruption, and caused a lack of social justice.

### 5.1 The Dignity Revolution – A Postponed Certainty

Regardless how long oppression lasts, and no matter how long dictatorships survive, they will end one day – a certainty that none of the Arab leaders expected. Since the mid 1980s, the regime survived by using socio-economic development tools, with the aid of Western countries and international organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank, to support the agricultural industry and tourism, to increase its exports, to create jobs, and to gain stable growth rates. This economic prosperity helped the regime to survive despite the discontent of the Tunisians with the oppression and lack of freedoms. However, economic stability could not last long with the continuously increasing unemployment (especially among the young and educated), growing inflation, and poor living conditions. The economy that barely survived the repercussions of the global financial crisis of 2008 could not escape from the European financial and sovereign debt crisis.

The Euro crisis had direct negative effects on the Tunisian economy and particularly the banking sector. Following a Board of Directors' meeting of the Central Bank of Tunisia on November 16, 2011, a published statement was issued showing the deteriorating economic situation of Tunisia (Tunisia-live 2011): Exports were declining (its main partners are EU countries), economic growth was slowing down, both foreign and domestic investments were falling short, and the declining number of tourists (the majority of tourists come from EU countries) was causing a significant drop in the revenues from touristic activities, simultaneously limiting the number of people benefitting from tourism. In addition, an increasing pressure on banks

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<sup>9</sup> Tunisia was the first MENA country to sign an Association Agreement with the EU in 1995 within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). Furthermore, Tunisia was among the first countries to have an Action Plan with the EU, which entered into force on 4 July 2005.

resulted from a drop in their liquidity, which affected their lending ability. The deteriorating economic situation increased debt, deficit, and inflation, tying the hands of the regime to solve the problem.

The inability of Ben Ali's regime to use socio-economic tools to secure the stability of its rule as it has done before, along with the decades of oppression and lack of basic freedoms, created suitable conditions for an explosion. The protests were then triggered by the self-immolation of Mohammed Bou-Azizi on 17 December 2010 after the confiscation of his vegetable cart and after being harassed and humiliated by a police officer in Sidi Bouzid. This symbolic act led peaceful marchers gathering in the same place where Bou-Azizi set himself on fire. The police and army's brutal response to these peaceful protests led to nationwide protests supported by labor unions and some parts of the elites such as lawyers. It did not take long before the will of Tunisians won and toppled Ben Ali.<sup>10</sup>

The fall of Ben Ali's regime paved the way for a free and fair election on 23 October 2011, won by *En-Nahda Party* which formed a coalition with the centre-left *Congress for the Republic* and the left party *Et-Takatol*. Despite the successful elections, the road towards building a democratic system and economic recovery is long. Thus, the EU and the West need to help stabilize and develop the Tunisian political and economic system. However, without institutional, technical, and financial support to develop the economic and social situation, political and democratic reforms would lag behind (The World Bank 2012a and 2012b).

## 5.2 Post-Revolution Measures and the Role of the EU

What the EU and the West have been trying to avoid for decades has happened now: Islamists are taking over in several Arab countries.<sup>11</sup> The good news for the EU is that there is no Islamic ideology in the region that could lead to a strong coalition and threaten the security and stability that the EU has been building for decades. Islamists such as *En-Nahda* in Tunisia are totally different from the Salafis or the Muslim Brotherhood. The Justice and Development Party in Morocco could be the closest to *En-Nahda*. Both adhere to a more Western kind of Islam – a mix of Islamic and Western traditions, not only from a cultural perspective, but also from a political one. Democratic transition and consolidation is a necessary step to guarantee stability and security on the Southern borders. Otherwise, the situation might end up with another failed or hybrid democracy that will create security threats to the EU and the whole region (trans-Mediterranean terrorism, illegal immigration, organized crime etc.).

The real test is to help moderate Islamic parties to move their countries to consolidated democracies with functioning economies. The type of democracy that might emerge might not be a total replication of the Western type that the EU preaches, but a slightly different democracy mixed with some Islamic values and criteria reflecting the needs and interests of citizens. This kind of democracy is possible according to EU officials such as the European Parliament's president Jerzy Buzek (Middle East Monitor 2011). A success of the transition would send strong messages to the rest of the region and could have a positive spillover effect.

<sup>10</sup> Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia after 28 days (14 January 2011), ending 23 years of oppression.

<sup>11</sup> Among the reasons for this rise of Islamic groups in the region generally and in Tunisia particularly are, in addition to their popularity and unity, the long years of oppression, their strong organization, and the division among secular groups.

Despite the fact that Tunisians view the EU and its member states (mainly France) with suspicion due to their blunt support for Ben Ali's regime and the turning of a blind eye to its human rights and freedom violation, they do acknowledge that they need the EU's assistance in this transition phase. The EU should draw lessons from its past experience in the MENA and CEECs to create a reviewed initiative that is more objective and would meet the expectations of Tunisians. It is important that the domestic environment in Tunisia is in favor of democracy, making the EU's support more effective.

The EU could use its three methods for spreading democracy beyond its borders: leverage, linkage, and governance. At the moment, linkage and governance would be the ideal type to support the transition. As the decades of Western support for Ben Ali created tensions and suspicions among the newly elected government, the leverage method could be implemented after having regained the trust of the countries of the region. Therefore, building trust is a prerequisite for applying political conditionality since any attempt to criticize certain policies of the Tunisian government that do not adhere to EU views would be considered as interference in its domestic affairs. Moreover, the issue of trust is reciprocal in which the new political elites in the region should also gain the trust that they will not violate the principles of human right, civil liberties, equalities etc.

Although EU membership is not the 'golden carrot' here (neither the EU is offering it nor Tunisia or the Mediterranean countries have interest in it at the moment), once the EU uses political conditionality, it could replace the political 'carrot' by an economic 'carrot'. Tunisians are interested in more agricultural liberalization, visa facilitation to increase mobility, and more economic cooperation leading to partake in the Single Market. I am not arguing that these incentives could be offered now, given the euro crisis and member states' divisions that limits the EU's ability of action, but they could be achieved on the long term. Besides, the influential role of the EU in international organizations such as the IMF, the World Bank, the United Nations etc. provides it with strong leverage and a more important position while dealing with Mediterranean countries.

Moreover, economically, Tunisia is highly dependent on the EU for its survival.<sup>12</sup> The EU is considered "Tunisia's first trading partner, accounting in 2008 for 64.5% of Tunisian imports and 72.1% of Tunisian exports" (European Commission 2010). In 2008, Tunisia was the first Mediterranean country to remove tariffs for industrial products, thus creating a free trade area with the EU. Furthermore, Tunisia is ranked as the EU's thirty-first largest trading partner (European Commission 2010). As a result, the EU has a strong leverage position to push for political reforms in Tunisia. European and Western support for consolidating democracy in Tunisia could finally be fruitful with the fall of the authoritarian regime and the will of the Tunisians and the elected government to implement all the necessary reforms to have a stable democratic system in the near future.

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12 The European Commission considered the Tunisian authority's performance and spending of the allocated funds satisfactory. "The European Commission's financial co-operation strategy with Tunisia mainly aimed to achieve the right balance between action in the political and in the economic and social spheres" (European Commission 2012). Within the framework of the Barcelona Process, Tunisia was among the major beneficiaries from the Mesures d'accompagnement (MEDA) Programme (both MEDA I and MEDA II; 1995-2006) with an annual average commitment reaching around 80 million euro. With the ENP, the cooperation was strengthened and the National Indicative Programme (NIP) for the period 2007-2010 allocated 300 million euro for three main areas: economic governance, competitiveness, and convergence with the EU; human resources and improvements in employability; and sustainable development. The NIP for 2011-2013 has a budget of 240 million euro that focuses on the social (employment), economic (mainly developing enterprises), and the governance sector (mainly judicial system).

The Tunisians, the EU, and other international players need to focus on five areas to facilitate the democratization journey:

#### *National Reconciliation*

There are lessons that should be taken into consideration by the new Tunisian elites and the EU when offering advice and support. According to Amine Ghali,<sup>13</sup> Tunisians can learn from both failed and successful transitions following revolutions such as in Argentina (Dennison et al. 2011: 4), the marriage between the secular and religious parties post Augusto Pinochet in Chile, the transition in CEECs, or the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and the stalled democratization efforts afterwards. CEECs could play an active role by sharing their expertise regarding the transition they took following the fall of communism in 1989. Their role should not be limited to giving ideas, but also to be strongly involved in the construction of a functioning democratic and economic system.

An important assistance is to give advice on how to deal with the old regime's bureaucrats and officers who are present in all aspects of political, economic, social, and security branches of the country. Any attempt to isolate them is neither feasible nor affordable to the Tunisian government. CEECs could offer their expertise on how they dealt with the communist ruling parties. In many cases, communist parties were dissolved first, but eventually allowed to reform themselves and to become part of the political system (for example, the Communist party in Poland won the 1993 elections). Despite the calls for justice, revenge, and isolation for the entire old regime guards during the transition phase, there is a need to include some of them, at least those who were not corrupt. What is needed is something similar to the roundtable talks that took place in some CEECs. The Tunisian round table should include all genders and groups representing the various views and opinions in the society what could lay down the foundations of the democratic political system and economic reforms. The EU could facilitate the talks, probably leading to the reconciliation of the various religious, secular, and ethnic groups. The EU could act as the moderator or secretariat during the talks, which could be organized by the EU, Tunisia, and other international players.

#### *Economic Development*

For democratic transition to continue towards a consolidated democratic system, the deteriorated economic situation requires serious and fast action. It would be impossible to have a stable system without addressing the economic needs of the country. Among these problems are low growth, a high unemployment rate that is still increasing, especially among the youth and due to the disproportion between the increase of the educated and skilled youth and the tight domestic market, poverty, social inequality, as well as underdeveloped regions as a result of the previous regime's policies and political marginalization. Tunisians are seeking more EU support to address the socio-economic problems and the marginalized regions (the EU agreed to provide funding and assistance to develop some marginalized regions). The transitional government of Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali emphasized that Tunisia needs an EU "micro-Marshall Plan" (European Voice 2012).

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<sup>13</sup> Amine Ghali is program director of the Tunisia NGO al-Kawakibi Democracy Transition Center.

At the moment, the EU, the World Bank, and the EBRD in addition to other international organizations and influential powers are involved in or promised financial support to certain projects that could attract investments, create more jobs, and increase growth. Based on consultations with the “emerging civil society” on the priorities of the Tunisian economy, these players are working together to provide the financial and technical assistance to support the interim Tunisian government’s efforts to create and implement reform programs that address the urgent needs of the Tunisian economy (The World Bank 2012b). Creating a suitable environment that attracts investments and facilitates the opening of new businesses is an important area that Tunisia needs help with. The EBRD will be investing in various economic projects with the main focus on renewable energy. The EBRD’s financial support will not only target the economy and growth, but will also share its experience regarding democratization and reforms of the market economy.

The EU can provide the financial means and know-how to support small and medium enterprises. This would create more jobs and support growth. In order to stimulate the economy to prosper, it is not enough to prepare plans and fund projects. However, there is a need to train the labor force and to reform the educational system. The EU in cooperation with the Tunisian authorities could develop the educational system to meet international standards. The focus should not only be on commercial/business schools and collegiates (the academic schools), but also on vocational or technical schools, which are less advanced and not well viewed among the people of the region so far. The former Tunisian government started a reform process in the mid 1990s through the *Mise à Niveau de la Formation et de l’Emploi* (Manforme). Manforme’s main objectives have been to bridge the gap between the demand and supply, to promote flexible training capacity, to meet specific and changing skill requirements, and to encourage and finance training centers to spread the skills and know-how to the labor force in order to meet the demands of the market (OECD 2008: 647). However, it still needs a lot of financial and technical support to address the needs of the labor market. The EU could focus on this issue not only through financial means, but also through training programs and student exchange programs to enable Tunisians to gain experience and to acquire skills in EU countries.

Training programs targeting the economic development in Tunisia would allow the EU both to help Tunisia to create more jobs and to increase growth as well as to lower the percentage of illegal immigrants. By supporting economic development, training the labor force, and reforming the education system to meet international standards and local market demands, the EU and other partners would help the Tunisian government to address the socio-economic problems that led to the revolution. Otherwise, the road towards democratic reforms would be harder and they might not succeed if the economic development is ignored. Unsuccessful transition would lead to chaos and more security threats to the EU and mainly its Southern member states. Economic support is crucial to facilitate the work of the interim government regarding the political reforms, drafting the constitution, and preparing for the elections.

#### *Institutional, Administrative, and Political Reforms*

Institutional and political reforms are strongly correlated with the facilitation of economic growth and attracting investments. Fighting corruption, institutional and administrative reforms, accountability, transparency, and judiciary reform are areas in which Tunisia can benefit from the EU’s financial and administrative support and training programs. The EU could cooperate with the World Bank regarding assisting the



interim government in strengthening the business environment by creating joint committees that prepare a detailed report on the crucial administrative and bureaucratic steps required to build trust, transparency, and accountability.

The EU and Western countries could offer exchange programs to train Tunisian civil servants and bureaucrats. There is a real opportunity to see progress in governance and fighting corruption, especially in the judicial system and the public sector – areas that have been frozen in the EU relations with Tunisia. The EU and EU member states, the US and other developed countries can set a special exchange program to allow Tunisian bureaucrats from various ministries and the central bank to come to different institutions for training and internships, to gain experience on best practices and to get the necessary skills to meet the demands of the new system. Such programs will not be costly and allow the transfer of knowledge and experience from developed institutions in the West to Tunisian institutions.

The transitional government had some programs already launched such as “a US\$1.5 billion emergency plan to address unemployment and regional development, among a host of other concerns” (The World Bank, 2012a). Despite the small amount of money allocated for this program, Tunisia would need a lot of external support as indicated earlier in addition “structural reforms to create a dynamic private sector capable of producing the quality and quantity of jobs needed by Tunisia’s predominantly young population” (The World Bank, 2012a).

The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the International Finance Cooperation (IFC) have launched an interim strategy note (ISN) for the fiscal year 2013-2014 to “support the [Tunisian] authorities in the reforms necessary to promote private sector-led recovery and job creation, with a focus on openness, opportunity and accountability” (The World Bank 2012b). These reforms are necessary for sending the clear message that the business environment in Tunisia has changed in the direction of transparency and is more welcoming to foreign businesses. This program has been launched and requires further support to succeed. Various donors such as the World Bank Group: IBRD, the IFC in addition to Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) have facilitated its funding (The World Bank 2012b).

Since the parties and the party system are still immature, the organization of the parties, their financing, and the election process has to be detailed in the new constitution. The first post-revolution free elections that took place in Tunisia were monitored and financially and technically supported by the EU. Although this step is important, there is still a need to promote civic education for the public about democracy and the importance of participation and voting. This is an important step to help Tunisians to be more active civilians since, for a long time, their attitude has been that participating will not change the results of elections or political decisions. The EU can coordinate with some civil society groups and NGOs to arrange workshops in various parts of the country regarding civic education. This issue can also be included in the school curriculum.

Tunisia needs to implement a new criminal code and criminal procedure in addition to the creation of a constitutional court guaranteeing that implemented laws respect the constitution. A law on guaranteeing the freedom of expression and press is required since it was absent during the previous regime. The



International and European press and media can train their Tunisian counterparts in order to help them proceed to meet international standards.

#### *Rule of Law and Security Sectors*

One of the main steps is reforming or rewriting the constitution that should highlight the concept of separation of powers and the responsibility of the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary, as well as their accountability and the basic freedoms. This is a fundamental step towards democracy. The cooperation of all groups of the Tunisian society has to be part of these constitutional changes. The faster these reforms are taken; the better is the situation for the economy. Consequently, it is important that the interim government moves as fast as possible towards a Western system of governance and ruling, to adopt all the institutional reforms necessary to build a democratic system and a functioning market economy, and to amend the constitution and reform the legal system in order to make it suitable for a new democratic system based on respect for human rights and civil liberties.

The universal declaration of human rights' principles should be included in the constitution and be binding to domestic laws. The principles of rule of law, gender equality at workplace and in all aspects of social and political life, accountability and transparency, and the freedoms of expression, religion, and association should be the basis of the constitution. Equality of all Tunisians before the law despite their religion, ethnicity, belief etc. should be ensured in the new constitution. These laws should not only be on paper, but also be practiced and protected by the creation of a constitutional court.

Another important reform is the independency of the judiciary from all political influence. The judiciary, which has not been free since Tunisia's independence in the mid 1950s and has been suffering from corruption, needs reform to meet the demands of the people and the new era. The EU has allocated around 22 million euro for the reform of the judicial system in three phases. The focus was on the technical and financial support of judicial institutions and management as well as on training judges and attorneys and broadening their knowledge of laws and regulations.

The security forces and the Ministry of Interior have to be reformed and their responsibilities and powers to be detailed to avoid the abusive use of force and illegal acts. The EU and its member states could organize joint training sessions for the police and other security forces. Officers from the EU could come to Tunisia to share their expertise and offer advice and training. Moreover, the Tunisians should be able to send their officers to Western countries for training and gaining experience from their counterparts in the EU, US and other developed countries. Reforming the security forces' loyalty and ideology towards the Tunisian state and not to be personalized as in Ben Ali's period is crucial. Corrupt officers from the Ben Ali's era should be forced out of the service and given fair trials.

#### *Independent Civil Society*

Since the Barcelona process, the EU allocated parts of its financial support towards civil society organizations. Unfortunately, the Tunisian regime blocked funding to most organizations, and the EU was selective in its support since it wanted to avoid dealing with Islamic civil society groups, which were the

most organized groups during the old regime. The Islamic civil society groups have been active despite the regime's oppression that limited their margin of movement. This EU veto on Islamic civil society groups showed a lack of understanding of an important player in the Tunisian society. Ben Ali's regime allowed very few Islamic groups to exist, while other organizations were operating from abroad. The EU could assist Tunisia by sending legal experts to create "a legal framework for NGOs" and civil society groups (Loannides/Missiroli 2012: 5).

EU civil society groups could help develop their Tunisian counterparts. An active civil society that monitors the work of the government is a crucial element for a consolidated democracy. The EU should not be selective or biased in supporting some civil society groups and avoid dealing with the religious ones as it was the case during Ben Ali's era. Instead of isolating important players of the civil society, more partnership, assistance, and cooperation is required. Although EU funding for building an active civil society is important, it is even more relevant to train local non-state actors "on capacity building and professionalization so that they can play an important role in the transition and consolidation of democracy" (Loannides/Missiroli 2012: 5). The EU and other international actors could provide the necessary support to create "resource centres and the organisation of workshops on fundraising, management, public relations, lobbying and networking" (Loannides/Missiroli 2012: 5). These steps are necessary to equip these organizations with the basic skills to be active players in a bottom-up construction of a consolidated democratic system.

## 6. Conclusion

The Arab Spring caught the EU by surprise. The launching of a critical review of its ENP focusing on how to reform it is a good first step to improvement, but a lot of work is still to be done. Tunisia is a real test for the reformed ENP and a perfect window of opportunity for the EU to support democracy promotion and consolidation. Tunisia needs a political, technical, and economic micro-Marshall Plan that brings together expertise from the West and takes into consideration the domestic needs of the South. Political, institutional, and economic reforms have to be implemented simultaneously. The main economic and social reasons for the revolution (structural problems and high unemployment rates) necessitate an urgent economic reform strategy. Without a functioning economy that is capable of creating jobs and addressing the demands of Tunisians, there is no hope for democracy to prosper and the reasons for the revolution will not be addressed. This situation would lead to instability and security threats to the EU's Southern borders.

The EU could be effective in its relation with the North African countries by replacing the 'golden carrot' by another one such as more economic cooperation and gradual access to the Single Market. In addition, the EU's influence in the IMF, World Bank, EBRD etc. makes its role more important in supporting the Tunisian transition. This incentive will increase the effectiveness of the EU's role in democracy promotion beyond its borders. The EU and Tunisia have to set a detailed plan for the areas that need support and to clarify what role is expected from the EU. Allowing the Tunisians to set the plans and submitting them to the EU for consideration and support will have a better effect since, first, it shows that the EU is not interfering in the choices of the country and not violating the Tunisian sovereignty and, secondly, the plans will reflect the needs, views, and expectations of domestic players. After building trust with the Tunisians, the EU can

activate its political conditionality that has been on hold for a long time. A stricter conditionality (more for more and less for less) combined with detailed plans focusing on the five areas I characterized earlier will help guarantee that aid is going to the right places and spent properly. This should not be taken to mean that the EU is using political conditionality to interfere in domestic affairs, rather it should be understood as “a neutral process of cooperation, logically linking different dimensions, for instance through benchmarking” (Thépaut 2011: 4). In the case of human rights and freedoms’ violations as well as lacking respect of democratic principles and rule of law, the EU would suspend its support.<sup>14</sup>

The attitude that political Islam and democracy are not compatible should be reconsidered. There is a need to differentiate between moderate Islamists such as in Turkey, Tunisia, and Morocco and non-modern Islamists elsewhere since there is a clear difference between including some Islamic values into the new constitution that reflects the identity of Tunisians (or a part of them) and having a total Islamic system. Neither *En-Nahda* members nor others are interested in throwing away democracy. The EU could work closely with *En-Nahda* and help them to move the country into democracy. Helping the now ruling party in Tunisia to stabilize the economy is important to avoid the rise of radical groups. To guarantee the continuous cooperation regarding security, terrorism, and illegal immigration, the international community and the EU, there is a need to support the regime change, consolidate the democratic system, and reform the economy. This said, security, democratization, and economic growth are strongly correlated following the Dignity Revolution in Tunisia.

Besides, experience shows that religious parties (Christian parties in Europe for example) could be socialized in democratic systems and could become a strengthening force for democracy. They could keep their religious identity and play according to democratic rules. Nothing differs with moderate Islamic parties such as *En-Nahda* that could maintain its religious values and be part of a functioning democratic system in Tunisia.

As we have seen in this paper, supporting democratic consolidation in North Africa, Tunisia in this case, requires a few steps: The first step should be building trust between the EU and Tunisia and to focus on the five areas for consolidating democracy (national reconciliation, economic development, political and institutional reforms, rule of law and security forces, and civil society). This support and trust will help Tunisia to develop its economy and will decrease illegal immigration and security threats to the EU. The other step should be a change in the European mentality, still assuming that whatever the EU offers is better than what the rest of the world offers (whether the US, China or Russia). The third major step is to deal with the rise of Islamists tolerantly and have a better understanding of the domestic cultures of North African countries. Finally, the fourth step is to differentiate between the MENA countries rather than dealing with them collectively.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the general EU approach to the entire MENA region, the EU can put

14 Suspension of aid is part of the original Action Plans (EU Council 1996), however, it was never used with the South Mediterranean countries (Baracani 2005). The main reason for that has been the fear from not cooperating with respect to illegal immigration, terrorism, security etc. Thus, conditionality proved to be useless for autocratic regimes.

15 The main mistake of the EU in dealing with the Mediterranean countries has been its design of a common institutional structure for all its Southern neighbors, however, when it comes to implementation, the EU deals with countries at a bilateral level (Börzel et al. 2008; Börzel/van Hüllen 2011). The EU should not design a one way fits

its main focus on one case, Tunisia, and support the transition and democratic consolidation here. Once this case is successful, the EU could move to another potentially successful candidate that has a suitable domestic environment. This approach could prove to be more useful and successful rather than focusing on the entire region with all its differences. Besides, a successful case will send positive messages to the rest of the region.

The Tunisians can learn much from other countries' experience such as Latin America or the CEECs in this important interim period in which the constitution will be drafted and the foundation of a democratic system laid down. The current ruling elites should include all political parties and groups in framing the constitution to be representative for the Tunisian society, expecting a democratic system that takes into consideration the interest mix between European and Islamic values. The reform road is long for Tunisia and the country will need all the support it can get from the EU and the West, setting an example for the rest of the region that democracy in the Arab World is possible.

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all strategy to deal with the Mediterranean countries, but rather a case-by-case strategy that takes the domestic environment of each case into consideration. Now, there is a need to distinguish not only between countries that went through revolutions and those that have not, but also among the countries that had revolutions due to their major differences.

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